

## ATTACHMENT 1

### **MRCOG LEGISLATIVE PRIORITIES for the YEAR 2006 LEGISLATIVE SESSION**

#### **SUPPORT OF REGIONAL COUNCILS**

**Policy: Support for the State to consider using the seven State Planning & Development Districts anytime sub-state areas are identified in program implementation.**

Background: By using the seven State Planning & Development District boundaries, State departments and agencies would have the capability of sharing data and resources in their areas and maximize State program coordination with local governments through their Councils of Governments. Consistent planning boundaries would also eliminate duplication of efforts in programs that have similar objectives.

**Policy: Support State funding for the seven State Planning & Development Districts.**

Background: The Local Government Division of the New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration currently funds each of the State's seven State Planning and Development Districts for conducting regional and local community planning for economic development, land use management, transportation systems, water resources, and infrastructure development. Regional planning organizations also provide technical assistance, regional data and information, multi-governmental coordination, and most importantly, a forum for resolving regional issues.

The MRCOG supports continued State funding to all State Planning and Development Districts with increased amounts to cover the growing number of local government and state requests for technical assistance, planning research and data analysis, and for special projects on regional and multi-jurisdictional issues.

**Policy: Support Utilization of the seven State Planning & Development Districts in planning and prioritization of capital expenditures**

Background: The capital outlay system in New Mexico may undergo significant reform in the near future. When the Governor and Legislature consider reforming the process, MRCOG supports using the State's seven Planning and Development Districts to develop regional priorities, to identify projects of

regional significance, and to coordinate and track capital projects within their regions.

## **HOMELAND SECURITY**

**Policy: Support the Development of Regional Emergency and Preparedness Plans for Homeland Security and the Designation of the Councils of Government (State Planning and Development Districts) As Regional Coordinating Entities for Homeland Security**

Background: Local elected officials in every part of New Mexico must be seen as integral partners in the Homeland Security planning process. New Mexico's Councils of Governments (COGs) can play a valuable role in the development of local and regional emergency response plans. COGs were established by state law to provide a forum for the coordination of regional issues, and our memberships include the municipal, county, tribal governments, and special units of government in each region that should be included in the Homeland Security planning process. The State's seven COGs offer a well-established mechanism for the type of regional cooperation that Homeland Security demands.

Homeland Security initiatives should be developed on a regional basis and local elected officials must be an integral, ongoing part of the planning and implementation process. It seems a natural fit that the state's COGs facilitate that process.

MRCOG supports the use of COGs to assist the Office of Homeland Security in the development and coordination of emergency response plans at the local and regional level.

## **LOCAL GOVERNMENT REVENUE SOURCES**

**Policy: Support State financial assistance for local governments.**

Background: State financial assistance for municipal and county government operations and capital outlay construction has frequently been the only way such programs and facilities could be funded, especially for smaller municipalities and rural counties. Many of these local governments in New Mexico have severely restricted tax bases and inadequate bonding capacity.

The MRCOG supports increased grant funding assistance to local governments, and greater flexibility and authority to generate local revenues.

## **LAND USE**

**Policy: Support incentives for Transit Oriented Development to encourage housing and retail development near public transportation stations.**

Public transportation has the potential to provide significant health and economic benefits to local communities and their residents through expanded markets for business owners, greater access to employers, increased value and income for property owners, and enhanced tax revenues for local governments from rising land values, new business transactions, and expanded development. Transit-oriented development helps communities maximize the benefits of their public transportation systems.

MRCOG supports the creation of incentives such as Tax Increment Financing that encourage private investment in housing and retail development within walking distance of public transportation stations.

## **TRANSPORTATION**

**Policy: Support establishment of an ongoing revenue stream for State funding for the New Mexico Rail Runner Express and other public transportation programs.**

Background: Efficient transportation is vital to any healthy economy. Connecting employers with employees is a key component of economic development, and the efficient movement of goods and services is important to every business.

Studies show that reliable public transit is essential to the recruitment and retention of a high-quality workforce and, for many companies looking to relocate it is a key factor in the decision-making process. For many New Mexicans, the lack of public transportation is an enormous obstacle to employment, because many people in rural and urban areas cannot afford to own and maintain a reliable private automobile.

With the implementation of the New Mexico RailRunner commuter rail service, MRCOG supports the creation of a permanent funding source for the RailRunner and other public transportation in New Mexico.

**Policy: Support incentives for employers and employees to use public transportation for commuting.**

Public transportation offers many benefits to employers and workers, and business community support has been crucial to the affordability and quality of public transportation projects throughout the country. MRCOG supports employer and employee incentives that promote the use of public transportation for commuting.

**Policy: Support efforts to develop regional recreational facilities such as bicycle, pedestrian and equestrian trails.**

Recreational facilities have become recognized and utilized as additional means of transportation throughout various communities. The utilization of land and coordinated efforts amongst communities are important to the MRCOG and the residents of the region. MRCOG as a regional council is positioned to continue in the planning efforts to make these connections within our region.

**Policy: Support legislation that establishes MRCOG as the lead agency for the development and management of a “Pilot” Regional Safe Routes to School construction-grant program for the State of New Mexico Planning and Development District 3 / or AMPA.**

Background: The “Safe Routes to School” statute was created to address issues of bike and pedestrian safety for children traveling to and from school. Existing legislation does not include the State’s COGs, MPOs or RPO’s in the planning process, even though solutions will require coordination of effort among many agencies, officials at all levels, and interested citizens across the region. MRCOG, as a regional council, includes representation from local and special purpose units of government within the region and is ideally positioned to work with state agencies in managing a federal grant program to improve safe routes to and from school.

MRCOG supports creating a pilot Safe Routes to Schools program within the existing MPO structure to administer Federal program funds within the Albuquerque Metropolitan Planning Area.

## **WATER**

**Policy: Support coordination of bosque management on a regional level and continued funding for Bosque Restoration projects in the middle Rio Grande valley including the counties of Sandoval, Bernalillo, Valencia, and Socorro**

Background: There are many federal, State, and local entities with jurisdiction over the Rio Grande bosque within the MRCOG region, and several have initiated bosque restoration projects in the area. MRCOG supports the cooperative development of a long-range regional bosque management plan and the coordination of bosque restoration activities within the region to reduce duplication and maximize the impact of the resources available

It is believed that approximately 20-30% of the water consumed in the Middle Rio Grande Valley is water lost through evapotranspiration from Bosque vegetation. Also, there is an increasing frequency of fires in the Bosque due to overgrown vegetation, particularly of non-native plants such as salt cedar. A major effort to preserve the water resources of the Rio Grande valley includes plant thinning projects to reduce evapotranspiration and eliminate fuel for wildfires.

**Policy: Support comprehensive reform of the State's water planning and management process.**

Background: The availability of water, with its influence on virtually every aspect of life in this state, is *the* most important issue facing New Mexico today and the current drought has emphasized the need to protect and conserve the state's water resources. Our existing system is fragmented with water policy responsibility scattered among various state offices such as the Office of the State Engineer, the Water Trust Board, and the Interstate Stream Commission. The state would benefit from comprehensive reform that combines all aspects of water management under one roof, and employs the seven State Planning & Development Districts to establish and implement water policy on a regional level.

**Policy: Support legislation that would preserve water rights for conservation efforts within the State of New Mexico.**

Background: Drought conditions in New Mexico have underscored the importance of promoting water conservation measures. However, under current State law, water rights associated with water that is not put to beneficial use are subject to forfeiture. The "use it or lose it" provisions in State law do not encourage conservation or wise use of water. We support legislation to promote water conservation while protecting water rights.

**Policy: Support Drought Education**

Background: The MRCOG supports increased funding for drought education and water conservation programs at the state and local level. As a regional planning organization the MRCOG is well positioned to coordinate local and regional drought education efforts and protection of shared watersheds.

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**Policy: Support the Job Training Incentive Program (JTIP)**

Background: This incentive program has proven to be one of the most effective state-wide economic development tools. The funds go directly to support jobs for New Mexicans by subsidizing trainee wages for qualified hires. This legislation is

consistent with our workforce efforts in that it provides opportunities for employees while simultaneously attracting the attention of new and existing businesses.

**Policy: Support the Business Incubator Development Program**

Background: Business incubation is a proven economic development model for growing healthy businesses locally and creating good jobs. The U.S. Department of Commerce reports that every \$1 in public investment in business incubators returns more than \$4.50 in taxes and economic growth. Nationwide, 87 percent of firms that graduate from incubators remain in business after five years and 84 percent of those firms remain in their local communities.

MRCOG supports the appropriation of at least \$5 Million of capital on a matching basis for competitive grants to expand or build new business incubator facilities and provide \$300,000 of operating funds to help launch new incubators and offer new programs at existing incubators.

**Policy: Support the MainStreet Initiative**

Background: MainStreet has a proven track record for revitalization and redeveloping rural communities and downtowns across New Mexico through the creation of local public/private partnerships. This funding will support building rehabilitations and investments in rural communities and downtowns across New Mexico, resulting in new and expanding businesses and jobs. Historically, in New Mexico, every \$1 of MainStreet public funds has leveraged \$12 of private sector money.

MRCOG supports a special appropriation of \$500,000 to provide revitalization resources and services to the 8 Start-Up and Satellite MainStreet communities started last year and add 10 new communities to the program in 2006. MRCOG supports an additional \$4 Million appropriation to the MainStreet Capital Outlay Fund to support critical public infrastructure in rural downtowns and deteriorating urban neighborhoods

**AGRICULTURE**

**Policy: Support Agricultural Land Preservation**

Background: The MRCOG's Agribusiness Task Force supports the preservation of agriculture lands along the Middle Rio Grande Valley. Agriculture land preservation strategies, such as purchase of development rights, conservation easements, compensate and reward farmers and ranchers while also assuring the preservation of agriculture lands.

## **GOVERNMENT EFFICIENCY**

**Policy: Support the streamlining of State laws pertaining to the administration of the Temporary Assistance for Needy Families (TANF) program**

Background: State laws governing the administration of the TANF program are more complex and restrictive than Federal law requires. As a result, the delivery of TANF services is often compromised when staff resources are diverted by burdensome reporting requirements.

MRCOG supports the revision of state TANF laws to streamline that program and make state law consistent with Federal requirements.